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REVIEW
OF
PROF. NORTON'S STATEMENT
OF
REASONS FOR NOT BELIEVING
THE
DOCTRINES OF TRINITARIANS,
CONCERNING THE
NATURE OF GOD AND THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

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REVIEW, &c.



In the appearance of this volume, we have another significant token, that Unitarianism, on this side of the Atlantic as well as on the other, is rapidly fulfilling the predictions of the friends of the bible. It is advancing, in the full blazonry of unbelief, to destruction. It was necessary that before its final death-struggle, it should for a while assume its true character; as the Evil Spirits are said, in God's word, to have torn the men possessed, before they came out. Here is another stride towards the gloomy gulf of open infidelity; and this volume might more appropriately have been entitled, *A statement of Reasons why Unitarians ought to be considered as Infidels and not Christians*. We are glad on the whole, that the work of making this statement, has fallen into the hands of so genuine a Neologist, and rejecter of God's word, as Professor Norton. We call him a rejecter of God's word; nor will our readers esteem the phrase inappropriate, if they open his book, and behold the cool indifference, with which he strikes out epistle after epistle from the sacred canon, whenever its richness and fullness of "heavenly places in Christ Jesus," are too powerfully contrasted with the meager, death-like phantom of his own "Reasons for not believing." He has treated the bible, and the character of Jesus with such cool, anatomizing infidelity, that all but those initiated and confirmed in the heathen irreligion of the sect, must, we think, be startled into salutary reflection. Such, if we are rightly informed, is already the case with some; and we hope the extent of infidelity, to which he has proceeded in his "Statement," may prove the means of awakening to a conviction of their error a multitude of others, who have hitherto slumbered in the dreadful delusion of Unitarianism.

It is by no means our intention to review this book in detail. As an attack on the doctrine of the trinity, it contains nothing in the way of argument, which is likely to disturb the faith of any intelligent believer. But like most of Mr. Norton's productions, it is marked by a tone of insolence and contempt towards the great body of the christian public, which not only justifies, but demands the very plain language which we mean to use, in exposing the real nature and tendency of his speculations. As a specimen of the language which he thinks it decent to adopt, we select the following passage from many of a similar kind. "In urging such obvious arguments as these there is a humiliating consciousness of the weakness of the cause we are opposing. One may

feel as if he were wasting reasoning upon a subject unworthy of it; as if his remarks implied a want of common intelligence in his readers; as if he were exposed to the same ridicule, as he who should gravely and earnestly labor the proof of an undeniable proposition." p. 214.

When one or two more volumes like this shall have issued from the mint of modern Unitarianism, with prefaces that have the unblushing impudence to assert in the face of all the intelligent world, that the great doctrine of the trinity has become obsolete, and that "an allusion to it, occurring in any discussion, written or oral, not purely seetarian, would be regarded as a trait of fanaticism;"—when our American literature shall be infested with a few more such volumes, pretending in all our shops to be the only safe remedy extant against infidelity, and under pretense of making the bible a book which infidels can believe, destroying all its spirituality and undermining our confidence in its sacred authority,—it will then be time for another work like that of Leland on the Deistical Writers, to come forth on a similar expedition and crush them at a grasp. Mr. Norton himself promises to enrich the precious collection in the "*hortus siccus* of dissent," by the publication of his own attack, (which he partly concocted long since, and perhaps will finish speedily, that the world may be rid of one great obstacle in the way of the doctrine of the trinity's becoming 'obsolete,') on the canonical authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Perhaps also he will live to furnish the world with the evidence of his opinion, that the second epistle of Peter, is not the work of that apostle. It may be, moreover, that in his anxiety to relieve all men's consciences as well as his own, of the unwarrantable burden of divine truth, which has so long weighed upon them, he may enlighten us with the grounds of his belief, that the Apocalypse is not the work of St. John. After all this is accomplished, the author of the "Statement of Reasons for *not* believing," will perhaps have discovered some convenient mode of shuffling the first eighteen verses of the first chapter of the gospel of John, among his list of *passages interpolated or corrupted*. He has already exhibited an ingenuity of translation which would put Gilbert Wakefield himself to the blush, and may perhaps suggest to the minds of some of the sect, the expediency of an improved version, even of the Improved Version itself. If he could succeed in putting the ban of interpolation and corruption on these troublesome words of the beloved disciple, it would certainly be as plausible a process, as that hitherto unheard of resort, the use of the English word *power*, as a translation of the Greek word *Logos*! Admirable specimen of Exegesis! It is outdone, however, in several instances in this same volume. Indeed the eagerness with which the Unitarians have thrown themselves into the unbounded field of gratuitous conjecture, speculation, insertions, and alterations at will, in the interpretation of the scrip-

tures, would of itself be enough to throw strong suspicion on a theological system which needs to be bolstered up by such miserable support.

Before the author of the "Statement of Reasons for not believing," shall be able to enlighten the public in regard to the propriety, intelligence, politeness, and excellence of unbelief, (in regard to its innocency they have already been instructed and liberalized) Unitarianism in this country, we believe, will have shared the fate of Unitarianism in England; and in speaking of it we shall have to use the language of the author of the Natural History of Enthusiasm.

"Were it asked how far the Socinian error *now* checks the promulgation and progress of the gospel, it would be impossible to make so small a matter palpable in our reply. To affirm that the great principles of religion are at present endangered by the feeble and expiring remains of Socinianism, were much the same as to say, that the throne and constitution of Britain is in jeopardy by the lurking attachment of the people to the house of Stuart!"

"The contrary is the fact. We are strengthened by the puny heresy, that yet gasps here and there about us. The modern history, the fate, and the present actual condition of the doctrine absurdly called Unitarianism, is quite enough to convince any man of sense, that the sceptical argument is a mere sophism, even if he knew nothing of the merits of the question. And this edifying history and spectacle, does in fact produce a proper effect upon the minds of men, and does actually seal the theological argument as it ought. Is Unitarianism christianity? Read the story of its rise in modern times, of its progress and decay, and look at the meager phantom as it now haunts the dry places it has retired to! Is this pitiful shadow christianity?"

From Professor Norton's preface, notwithstanding our remembrance of such names as Bacon, and Boyle, Hale, Mackintosh and Hall, we should certainly be led to think, that there never was, nor can now be found, an intelligent Trinitarian in existence; and that "all the departments of polite literature, moral science, and natural religion" have, by common consent, been baptized into the liberalizing and vapid negations of Unitarianism. On this point, a sentence from Burke will commend itself to our readers. "Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern, make the field ring with their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadows of the British oak, chew their cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field; that of course they are many in number; or that, after all, they are other than the little shrivelled, meager, hopping, though loud and troublesome, insects of the hour." If Mr. Norton wishes to find one of the earliest notices of his own sect in "any department of polite literature," we suggest for his consideration, Burke's speech on the petition of the Unitarians; es-

pecially that passage of it which contains the following sentence: "This is the first time that our records of parliament have had, or our experience or history given, an account of any religious congregation or association, known by the name which these petitioners have assumed." It is curious to observe that at this early period, the elements of Unitarian zeal were as clearly analyzed as they can be even now. "It is somewhat remarkable" says Burke in the *Reflections on the Revolution*, speaking of Dr. Price, "that this reverend divine should be so earnest for setting up new churches, and so perfectly indifferent concerning the doctrine which may be taught in them. His zeal is of a curious character. It is not for the propagation of his own opinion, but of *any* opinions. It is not for the diffusing of truth, but for the spreading of contradiction. Let the noble teacher but dissent, and it is no matter from whom or from what. This great point once secured, it is taken for granted their religion will be rational and manly."

Their religion Robert Hall has admirably described as "*an exhausting process.*" "It consists in affirming, that the writers of the new testament were *not*, properly speaking, inspired, nor infallible guides in divine matters; that Jesus Christ did *not* die for our sins, nor is the proper object of worship, nor even impeccable; that there is *not* any provision made in the sanctification of the Spirit for the aid of spiritual weakness, or the cure of spiritual maladies; that we have *not* an intercessor at the right hand of God; that Christ is *not* present with his saints, nor his saints when they quit the body, present with the Lord; that man is *not* composed of a material and immaterial principle; but consists merely of organized matter, which is totally dissolved at death. To look for elevation of moral sentiment from such a series of pure negations, would be to gather grapes of thorns, and figs of thistles,—to extract sunbeams from a cucumber."

To this statement of "*not believing,*" this catalogue of negations, we may add from the volume before us, that Jesus Christ did *not* exist before he was born into this world, or in other words, that he was *not* really before Abraham, that he had *not* glory with the Father before the world was, (p. 169-75;) that He has *not* now any superintendence over the concerns of his followers, (p. 163;) that where two or three are gathered together in his name, he is *not* there in the midst of them, (p. 159;) that the examples of prayer to Christ in the new testament can *not* be considered as affording any example or authority for prayer to Christ under ordinary circumstances, (p. 160;) that he is *not* personally present with his disciples, (p. 163;) that he has *not* gone to prepare a place for them, (p. 202;) that he is *not* the judge of all, (p. 212;) that he will *not* personally come in the glory of his Father with his holy angels, to render to every man according to his deeds, (p. 204;) that His language respecting his own future coming and judgment

of men, was *not* understood by his own apostles, (p. 212;) that this language is a scenical representation, (p. 212;) that the apostles taught gross errors, "St. Paul had fallen into a mistake," (p. 300;) that Paul did *not* write the Epistle to the Hebrews; that Peter did *not* write the second of his own Epistles; that John did *not* write the Apocalypse; that the christianity of revelation does *not* teach men any truths which they might not learn from mere natural religion; and to all this we may add, the explicit declaration of Mr. Norton elsewhere, "*that the canonical books of the new testament are not the revelation which God made by Christ.*" The volume that contains such negations, in the form of Statements for not Believing, deserves, better than the Deist Tindal's book, the title "*Christianity as old as the Creation.*" Deism, as distinguished from Atheism, Robert Hall remarks truly, embraces almost every thing which the Unitarians profess to believe.

And now our readers may be ready to ask, 'In the name of all that is sacred, what *do* they believe, after having rejected such an accumulation of revealed truth?' We will let Professor Norton stand at the bar, and make his solemn answer.

"Christianity, WE BELIEVE, has taught men to know God, and has revealed him as the Father of his creatures. It has made known his infinite perfections, his providence, and his moral government. It has directed us to look up to Him as the Being, on whom we and all things are entirely dependent, and to look up to Him with perfect confidence and love. It has made known to us that we are to live forever; it has brought life and immortality to light. Man was a creature of this earth, and it has raised him to a far nobler rank, and taught him to regard himself as an immortal being, the child of God. It calls the sinner to reformation and hope. It affords to virtue the highest possible sanctions. It gives to sorrow its best, and often, its only consolation. It presents us, in the life of our great Master, with an example of that moral perfection, which is to be the constant object of our exertions. It has established the truths which it teaches upon evidence the most satisfactory. It is a most glorious display of the Deity, and of his care for the beings of this earth. It has lifted the veil which separated God from his creatures, and this life from eternity." pp. 289, 290.

Here is the creed of Unitarians: let all the world hear. They say WE BELIEVE! In the very Statement of Reasons for not Believing, they have at length uttered a believing affirmation! The oracle has spoken.

"Leave, oh leave me, to repose!"

And what has it spoken? Most lame and impotent conclusion! Not one solitary syllable in regard to a SAVIOR, nor the most distant intimation that in all God's plan there *is* one! If we could not select from the works of Plato, a creed at least equal in richness and elevation of sentiment, and more nearly approximating to

divine truth, we are sadly mistaken. We say, *more nearly approximating to divine truth*, for we could find in Plato no doubtful recognition of the truths of man's depravity, the malignity of sin, and the certainty of a future retribution. But these are things which Unitarians do not love to dwell upon. The shrinking soul, oppressed with a sense of guilt, looks round in anguish for a MEDIATOR between God and man; but the idea of a mediator, is one which the Unitarians seem perfectly to abhor. They thank God they can come into God's presence without a mediator. No wonder, then, that their system excludes every thing which would lead the soul to the conviction of its guilt, and the search for an atonement, and therefore every thing peculiar to the gospel;—the depravity of man, the infinite evil of sin, the great day of judgment, an Almighty Savior. It would task the critical ingenuity of Professor Norton himself, to discover in this creed of Unitarianism, the slightest traces of these fundamental truths. Indeed, its poverty is such as Plato would have pitied, and the very Deist, in reference to its pretensions to have come from revelation, would scorn.

And yet this stale and lifeless creed, which Paine himself would probably have accepted without the slightest amelioration either in his intellect or heart, from which all mention of a Savior is studiously excluded, and which, even as an exposition of natural religion is ineffably weak and soul-less, this is the vaunted remedy for infidelity! This is to be substituted for Jesus Christ and him crucified, and offered to the expecting nations as the sole product of all the wonders of revelation! But no: we mistake: it will *not* be offered to the nations: Unitarianism has no missionaries, cannot support *one*. We are thankful that it is impossible for this delusion and the missionary spirit, to live together.

It is not strange that the admirers of this system think it will suit infidels. Voltaire himself would have received it as the only creed for a gentleman, ridiculing nothing about it but its pretensions to revelation. It *does* suit infidels. It is a creed which the unregenerate, unbelieving heart craves. Mr. Norton is perfectly right in believing, that when all the peculiar doctrines of the bible are blotted out, and its spirituality explained away, there will then no longer be infidels. True; there will be nothing left to disbelieve, nothing for infidelity to fasten on. There will no longer be any opportunity for exercising the power of dissent. And when this is the case, what will become of that religion whose whole existence is manifested in unbelief, and whose very creed consists in Statements of Reasons for not believing? The millennium of release from the bondage of orthodoxy, to which the Professor so devoutly aspires, will be the signal for the extinction of a sect that lives by disbelieving; since there will then be no proposition to reject or contend against, and therefore no one principle of union

or life. Other principle they have none, than that of negation. Antagonism to orthodoxy is their sole principle of vitality.

As we said before, we have no intention of examining this volume in detail, for it carries with it its own refutation. One or two points in its tenor we will touch upon, and then proceed to the consideration of some *principles*, of which every individual, who wishes to discover, and not to evade and do away, the meaning of the bible, must acknowledge the reasonableness and authority.

Mr. Norton's preparations to undeceive his readers in regard to those passages of scripture which directly contradict his theory, and which they have always been accustomed to interpret according to their plain meaning, are truly amusing. On every such occasion he is compelled to a preliminary movement, thus: In order to comprehend correctly the purport of this mistaken passage, we must consider—that it is very difficult to know what the bible does mean; that it is very liable to be misunderstood; that its expressions are figurative, and that their explanation is to be found in analagous metaphors, the meaning of which is obvious; and that, however bold some of them may appear, they do not transcend the genius of the oriental style. Or thus: We must not explain this passage literally, for if we did, it would teach the divinity of Christ, and this would “involve an absurdity, and a contradiction to what is elsewhere said by the Evangelist,;” wherefore, it is, “unquestionable,” that the literal interpretation, “cannot be admitted.” Or thus: It is very manifest that this passage cannot mean what its language evidently implies; for, it would be contrary to reason, and to all our preconceived notions of things: in order to know what it *does* mean, we must remember *the oriental forms of speech*, and put it into a metaphor. Or thus: We shall err here, if we do not bear in mind the peculiar philosophical views of the Jews, and their mistakes about the character of the Messiah. We must remember that they applied a great many passages from the old testament to Christ, and so did his own disciples and the apostles under his teaching, which ought not to have been so applied. Or thus; The passage we are now to consider, seems difficult, it is true; but we must remember that the apostles were liable to error, and this passage contains a mistake of theirs, which ‘their Master,’ being engaged about so many other things, had no time to correct. Or thus: We are not to suppose that in this passage the apostle intended to be understood according to his obvious meaning; his real meaning was probably this, etc. etc. etc.

Into all these awkward predicaments, the Unitarians are driven, not to explain, but to explain *away* God's word. They make the bible a book, which needs another revelation, to prevent us from understanding it according to its plain import. To all this laborious and perplexing array of “peculiar circumstances,” and “Jewish errors,” and “traditionary delusions,” and dribblings of

criticism about the "oriental style," and "metaphors," and "figures of speech," and apostolic "mistakes," which our Savior did not think it worth while to correct, they are compelled, in order to keep an unprejudiced reader from running into the orthodox faith at every step. And all this in regard to a book, which God represents to be "a light shining in a dark place," a book intended to be so plain, that "a way-faring man, though a fool, need not err therein;" a book, which, if we permit it to shine without restraint, proves always in every part of it, "a light to our feet and a lamp to our paths;" and a book of which the holiest and wisest of men have always regarded the most simple, unlearned, and unelaborate interpretation, to be the safest and the best. This book they dare not permit any one to read, except through the fog and haze of their own cautionary speculations. It is indeed curious to observe a set of interpreters, whose efforts are directed, not to elicit the truth, but to provide a shield for its blaze, in metaphors and figures of speech and unfortunate mistakes of the apostles: a set of critics, whose labor is, to prevent the world from understanding the bible according to its obvious import: whose anxiety is not to explain the bible, but to *unspiritualize* it, diminish its authority, fill it with errors, and turn it into a mass of fables. We hold up such efforts to the scorn and indignation of all who venerate the inspired volume.

One or two points more, and we have done with this volume, except as the principles we shall suggest for the consideration of our readers, do of themselves refute and condemn it. Mr. Norton does *not* believe that Christ will judge the world. Our Savior's own language in regard to this solemn subject, he thinks was nothing but a "figure of speech," a bold metaphor. Yet he acknowledges that the apostles did believe and teach that Christ will judge the world. Notwithstanding this belief however, he thinks they were so honest, as to have *recorded* nothing more on this subject, as from the *lips of Christ*, than what he really uttered. Wonderful integrity! And as this language, Mr. Norton thinks, can be so construed as not to refer to His being our final judge; such conduct in the apostles proves, to his mind, that they had no *intention* to deceive! For otherwise, "they would have made their master say what they themselves have said, in language as explicit as their own!" "*An error of the Apostles proves the reality of their faith!*" p. 328-9.

"A Daniel! yea, a Daniel come to judgment!"

Mr. Norton exhibits such rare talent in this kind of argument for the credibility of the gospel history, that we cannot but suggest the consecration of his critical acumen to the preparation of a work on the veracity of the writers. And we will state the proposition which we think him eminently calculated to support. *The veracity of the Apostles is in a ratio directly proportionate to the*

number of errors they taught, and the grösness of their misunderstanding of Christ's words. Or, in other language, *In proportion as the Apostles mistook the Savior, and taught contrary to the truth, in that proportion they are worthy to be believed.*

We will here exhibit one or two additional examples of the manner in which Professor Norton explains *away* the scriptures. But first we will quote the following passage from the learned Titmann, in regard to *inept* interpretation. (Biblical Repository, No. iii. p. 459.)

"It is exhibited when a sentiment is obtruded upon a writer, which is alike foreign to his constant manner of speaking and thinking, and to his intention and object. As if one should say that Paul, in Eph. i: 7, *in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins*, had in mind the system of christian doctrine; and we should go on to interpret redemption through his blood, etc., of a deliverance from sin which is effected by this doctrine, confirmed by the death of Christ. Such interpretation is supported neither by the manner in which the apostle is accustomed to speak of the death of Christ, nor by the object of the writer, nor the method of the whole discussion, nor by the mode of thinking among the christians to whom the apostles wrote; unless the utmost violence be put upon the words."

We return to Mr. N. Christ says, Where two or three are met together in my name, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM. Hear our expounder, "By the latter words our Savior did not mean to affirm that he would be present with them to hear their prayers, which would be inconsistent with the words preceding.—His purpose was to declare that the designs, labors, and prayers, in which his followers might unite for the promotion of his cause, would be *equally* blessed with his own."—p. 159. In another place, p. 202, 203. "By this our Savior intended that the prayers of his followers—would be granted *as if*—he himself were praying with them." Again, Paul exhorts the Colossians to forgive each other, "as Christ has forgiven them," Hear our expounder. "Not referring to any forgiveness from Christ in person."—p. 198. Again, Paul says, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." Our expounder says, "Intending by those words to express the unchangeableness of christian truth."—p. 199. "In like manner, when he declares, that he has come 'to save the world,' he refers to *the power of his religion* in delivering men," etc.—p. 200. Again, "in my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." etc. Our expounder says of this precious promise, "When Jesus thus speaks of preparing a place for his disciples, and after preparation returning to take them with him,—the meaning is, Your future blessedness will be as great, and is as certain, *as if* it were prepared for you by me," etc. p. 202. Again, "The son of man shall come in the glory of his fa-

ther, with his holy angels, and then shall he render to every one according to his deeds." Hear our expounder, "Angels were conceived of by the Jews as ministers of God's providence; and Christ, *conforming his language to their conceptions*, repeatedly speaks of the ministry of angels, *figuratively*, to denote some manifestation of the power of God. Thus he tells Nathaniel, "Ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man;" meaning, Ye shall witness manifest proof of the relation existing between God and me his minister. When our Savior speaks of his coming with the glory of God and his angels, he does not mean by these figures to express that he will himself appear in person," etc. p. 204. It is a gross and violent insult, thus to deal with the sacred volume.

We did not mean to tax the patience of our readers any farther; yet we cannot dismiss the volume without calling their attention, (should they meet with it,) to the passage from page 318 to 323, as containing one of the most presumptuous criticisms on the motives and teaching of our Savior, that we remember ever to have met with. Professor Norton does *not* believe in the existence and agency of fallen spirits. The apostles, he acknowledges, did; and the Lord Jesus sanctioned and confirmed this belief. Mr. Norton asks why he did this, when he must have known it was false!! He then goes on to answer, that "if he had taught the truth, he would immediately have been denounced by his enemies;" that their error on this point was connected with errors on many other subjects, in regard to which it was in vain for Christ to think of enlightening his ignorant and prejudiced hearers, which, however he must have done, had he attempted to teach them the truth in regard to the great point in question! Moreover, Mr. Norton thinks that in the cause of truth, "the language of error may be used, in order powerfully to affect the feelings;" and he represents Christ as doing this, our blessed Savior as sanctioning and confirming the errors of the Jews, "because no other modes of speech would have so powerfully affected their minds!!" He who is the way, the TRUTH, and the life, teaching error that good may come! The system which demands such speculations as these in its support, betrays its parentage at once: it is of its Father, the Devil.*

Mr. Norton remarks on the application by the Jews and the apostles, of many old testament predictions and types to the Messiah, "*One is surprised, perhaps, that this mistake was not corrected by Christ.*" "But would you have had him at the same

* In the following passage, we have one of the most striking exhibitions of the cold-blooded infidelity of Mr. Norton. "Supposing that Thomas had believed, and asserted, that his Master was God himself; *in what way should this affect our faith?*" p. 226. The belief then of one of the disciples respecting an *essential* doctrine, and a declaration of that belief made publicly to Christ himself, and received by him with *marked approbation*, would have no influence to change the opinion of Mr. N.!! Could Paine have said more?

time teach the whole art of interpretation?" "To enable his hearers to become skillful expositors of the old testament," (our readers will bear in mind that Christ is declared to have expounded to the disciples, in all the scriptures, "the things concerning himself," and this was the way undoubtedly in which they became such *skillful expositors of the old testament*,) "he must have settled the yet disputed questions concerning the age, the authorship, the authority, and WHAT HAS BEEN CALLED the *inspiration*, of the different writings that compose it; and whoever has studied these subjects with an unbiased and inquiring mind, may, I think, be satisfied, that the truth concerning them is such, as no Jew was prepared to listen to, and few indeed would have listened to without astonishment and wrath," (p.320.) Let our readers weigh the meaning of this latter sentence. We have marked the words *what has been called*: they convey to our minds another point in the declaration of Mr. Norton's creed of negatives, and that is, that the old testament is *not* inspired. The Jews firmly believed it was. Mr. Norton's views concerning it, which views he thinks, and rightly, our Lord did not teach, and for not teaching which he kindly undertakes to make an apology for Christ, are indeed such, as neither the Jews, nor the apostles, nor our Savior, would any of them have listened to without astonishment and indignation.

We will now proceed to mention a few principles of correct interpretation. They are *principles*: intimately connected with the state of the individuals own feelings; borrowing, indeed, all their influence from the soul of man in its relation to God its creator. They are not, therefore, external, nor, strictly speaking, expository; but internal, and requiring the exercise of thought, rather than the acquisition of any new knowledge.

One grand principle is this. *The bible should be interpreted in that manner which will most exalt God.* God is seeking the happiness of the universe, and the exaltation of himself; and the full exhibition of his own perfections is the only way in which the purposes of his infinite benevolence can be accomplished. Now the bible was sent into the world for this very purpose, the exhibition of his glory; manifestly, therefore, it ought to be interpreted in that way which will most exalt Him, no matter what the consequences are to man's character.

It should be interpreted according to its *own* exhibition of God, and not according to our previous conceptions in regard to him. Those conceptions are likely to be wrong. But, find out the character of God in the bible, and you have an unerring rule of interpretation for the whole of it. The law of gravitation interprets the movements of creation. Attempt an interpretation of them without this law, or with wrong conceptions of it, and we cannot so much as tell why an apple falls. Take a wrong conception of the character of

God, any other conception than that to be gained from his own word, and apply it to particular doctrines or events recorded in the scriptures, and the consequence must inevitably be, darkness and perplexity. Take the right idea of God's character, and in his light we see light. All things are clear, so far as they lie within our comprehension, and where they lie beyond it, the soul, that has a right view of God, is not only willing, but rejoices, to leave their explanation to the eternal world, and to God's own presence in heaven; assured, that though undiscoverable by human reason, they are yet in accordance with it; "that link follows link by necessary consequence; that religion soars out of the ken of reason, only where the eye of reason has reached its own horizon; and that faith is then but its continuation; even as the day softens away into the sweet twilight, and twilight, hushed and breathless, steals into the darkness."*

The bible should be interpreted in that way, which *exhibits ALL God's attributes, and not merely one or two*. Here is a great point. Men are willing enough to have some of God's attributes exhibited, provided they may be permitted to choose which. Let them make to themselves a God of their own invention, and the idea of such a being would not be a painful one: *they would be sure to make a God who indulges sin*. The God of the bible is not the God of their hearts, and therefore not the God according to whose whole character they are willing to interpret the bible. Here is the secret of the rejection of the great doctrine of the atonement, and an explanation of the bitter hostility which multitudes feel towards it. What is there in it, if the human heart were friendly to God, to excite any person's enmity? The truth is, this doctrine would not be opposed, if it did not exhibit *all* God's moral attributes. If it brought to view *only* his mercy and readiness to pardon; if it did not also exhibit in the most awful manner his holiness and justice; if it did not portray the evil of sin, and its infinite malignity; if it displayed in God an indulgent weakness, and considered sin but a small evil; if it did not flash terror across the path of every lover of sin and rejecter of Christ, shewing that to all such God is a consuming fire;—it would not excite hostility: every heart would receive it, and the most abandoned with the greatest readiness; and this very doctrine, now so bitterly opposed, would be more violently applauded; it would be the praise and boast even of the Lord's enemies. This doctrine exhibits God's justice as well as mercy, and *that* is the reason why men reject it; it is because they dread God's JUSTICE. Moreover, this despised doctrine includes within itself necessarily all the *hard* sayings of God's word; all truths cluster and crowd around it, and blaze in its light, like an-

* Biographia Literaria, vol. ii. p. 190.

gels around the throne of God. It is the sun of truth in the moral universe.

"Thither, as to their Fountain, other stars
Repairing, in their golden urns draw light,"

and are hung up all over the glorious firmament of God's word, displaying, in a thousand ways, man's guilt and danger, and in a thousand ways pointing and inviting to the cross of Jesus, man's only way of regeneration and only hope of safety. His death shows man's depravity. "If one died for all, then were all dead." It shows man's ruin. "He came to seek and to save that which was lost." His dying agonies demonstrate the evil of sin. "He condemned sin in the flesh." They show not only the infinite love of God—"God is love,"—but his infinite justice. "That he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." They show what those may expect, who die in their sins. They show the reality of hell as well as the certainty of heaven. They show that God is not trifling, neither with his own character, nor with the creatures he has made. In all this we learn the reason why the doctrine of the cross is so efficacious; why it is "the power of God unto salvation." It is not so by any arbitrary constitution, but because it displays God; all his attributes all in contrast with the character of the sinner. Humanly speaking, therefore, it is infinitely adapted to produce conviction of guilt and contrition of heart. It is an instrument worthy of being wielded by the omnipotent Spirit of God.

In the denial of this doctrine there is afforded a very clear case, in which a considerable number of men allow their own partial and distorted conceptions of God's character to lead them into an interpretation of the scriptures, which is glaring falsehood; to support which, they have to resort to arts of torture, instead of criticism, applied to God's word. The bible perplexes them. Whenever they open it, there is the same unaltered, troublesome language, respecting "Jesus Christ and him crucified," and his "blood shed for the remission of sins." They never can silence it, nor can all their ingenuity in the arts of critical blotting, and conjecture, and torture, afford their consciences a shield against this truth, or set them at rest in an interpretation perfectly and manifestly opposed to the whole tenor of the bible.

"With all organized truth," says Coleridge, and it is one of his greatest thoughts, "the component parts derive their significance from the idea of the whole. Bolingbroke removed grace, justice, and choice, from power and intelligence, and yet pretended to have left unimpaired the conception of a Deity. He might as consistently have paralyzed the optic nerve, and then excused himself by affirming that he had, however, not touched the eye." (The Friend, p. 38.)

We wish the modern Unitarians would take this truth, and ap-

ply it to their own most meager and defective views of the character of God, and to their rejection of the atonement in consequence of such partial, self-indulgent contemplations of its author. God's plan is perfect ; it could not be otherwise ; it is the equal manifestation of his whole character ; the only plan, by which he could fully manifest himself. The book of nature exhibits but part of God's character : Christ crucified, the whole. The works of God are glorious ; to a holy mind there is nothing on which God has laid the finger of his power, that does not sparkle with his glory ; though it were but a withered daisy, or a particle of brier-down floating in the summer's air, it speaks of Him. Yet, till we behold *God manifest in the flesh*, the study and wonder of angels, and arch-angels, and beings pure from sin, who perhaps read all God's physical universe as easily as we read the pages of a book, we are taught comparatively nothing of God. The atonement is a display of his character, whose study will occupy them and us forever and ever ; and they, who despise this doctrine are, in their infinite ignorance and pride and wickedness, despising the very way which God Almighty has chosen for the manifestation of himself to all the Universe. In throwing over it the veil of their own unbelief, they have shut out from their own souls what makes the bible a mighty book to the intellect as well as to the heart ; what gives it power to arrest and awe the soul of the highest archangel ; what makes it a book that the angels study ; what has made it the intellectual lever with which God himself, moves and heaves the world. Their whole system, if system it can be called,

"The other shape,
If shape it might be called, that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,
Or substance might be called, that shadow seemed,
For each seemed either,"

is like a palsy to the intellect, withering, stagnant, unthinking, superficial ; and all the forms of literature itself, under that system must be superficial and soul-less. There is nothing in it to stir either the mind or the heart. In order to exist, they must keep, as to the knowledge of God's word, in an everlasting moral twilight, where the mind dares not move ; for the noonday blaze of God's word expels and purges off such error ; and then the mind encounters moral *principles*, instead of the flimsy sentimentalism of their speculations. Like the fiend floundering through chaos, and bent to reduce the world to her 'original darkness,' they ask,

"Which way the nearest coast of darkness lies,
Bordering on light ;"

and having found this region they rest contented ; for a step on the other side into the full light of the bible would utterly blind and confound them. The "veil is on their hearts ;" they see not the

glory of the bible; they have taken away its glory; they have taken away what makes it spirit and life to the soul, and no wonder it is to them an uninteresting volume. No wonder they are so ready to give up book after book, epistle after epistle, endeavoring to set aside its authenticity and get rid of its authority, surrendering it at the slightest attack of scepticism, and tossed upon a sea of doubt in regard to the whole of the sacred canon. No wonder they deem unbelief no crime, though God himself has fixed upon it the seal and sentence of his abiding wrath. They have taken away the power of the bible over the conscience and the heart, and leave it more lifeless than the Koran, inasmuch as in it there are no appeals to human passion, no flattery of human selfishness. No wonder they care little for sending such a book to the heathen, nor that they think the world may be as easily christianized by a case of mathematical instruments. They have destroyed the soul of the bible. It has no soul, if it has no atonement, no Jesus Christ and him *crucified*. They have taken away the very thing which makes the bible the power of God unto salvation. "They have taken away our Lord, and we know not where they have laid him;" nor do they know themselves. They are an unhappy, most unhappy class; shivering in that gloomy, icy region, which lies between the heaven of heart-felt, saving faith, and the revolutionary hell of gross and outrageous infidelity.

Again: the bible should be interpreted not only according to the whole character of God, from whom it emanated, but according to the whole character of man, for whom it was intended. The moral aspect of that character is depravity. Therefore, it is not only in the light of God's character, but with the distinct remembrance of man's character also, that all the truths intended for man ought to be reflected on. The bible was not written for holy beings,—that is very evident,—but for the unholy; and with this one object in view, to recover them from a state of depravity and ruin, and to bring them back to God. Carrying along with us this great truth, we have another key of vast importance to the right interpretation of the whole bible; we must expect it to speak against ourselves, and must receive its reproofs home, and give as full credit to its dark representations of our own character, as we are willing to do to its bright representations of God's excellence. It comes to us as our Physician, to examine our fatal disease, and show to ourselves its terrible nature and symptoms, and to point out and administer the only possible remedy. If, now, we do not believe the truth that we have such a disease, the proposed remedy will seem needless, and so will all the severe discipline we are called upon to undergo; the bible will seem a gloomy book for proposing it, and we shall fall to contriving such methods of interpretation as will keep it out of view, and shall perhaps denounce both the rem-

edy and the discipline as fanatical, and the men who believe it, and act accordingly, as gloomy bigots. This is the way with the Unitarians. Rejecting the doctrine of human depravity, and having no conceptions of the infinite malignity of sin, they consequently deny the need of a Divine Savior, and are thankful they can approach God without a Mediator. To such persons, the bible, being a volume of disciplinary truths for the reformation of the depraved, can do no good; they put themselves in their pride beyond the pale of its influences. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

We may hear men complaining, What a gloomy system that is, which tells of man's depravity, and the eternal punishment of the wicked. And indeed it is a gloomy system to the depraved: it cannot be otherwise. To those who do not love God, the bible is a gloomy book, and cannot be otherwise. If it were not, it would be a self-indulgent book, indulgent to sin, and this would be enough to prove it not from God. It would no longer be the bible. It is necessarily gloomy to the impenitent, because it condemns him; that system which is not gloomy to an impenitent sinner, is, for this very reason, likely to be untrue. It is one of the greatest marks against the system of liberal christianity, so called, that it is so much applauded by men of this world, men of frivolity, gaiety, fashion, pleasure, and forgetfulness of God. It is indeed a very pleasant thing for such people to be told of the perfectibility of human nature, the pure and holy aspirations of the soul, and the needlessness of an atonement.

God is his own interpreter: and we must be willing to let *God's word interpret itself:* nothing else can do it, there being no other authority, but what is fallible. In the light of this principle, we see the wisdom of revealing it in so many forms, and having it address itself to all the faculties of the human intellect. There are the old testament and the new, interpreting each other; the histories, the prophecies, the gospels, the epistles. It addresses itself exclusively neither to the reasoning faculty, nor to the imagination, nor to the judgment, nor to the affections, but to all, and to each one through the medium of the other. The light of divine truth falls upon the prism of the human mind in every direction, and is reflected in every variety of coloring, as one side or another of that wonderful prism is presented to it. Add to this, that it speaks to different ages of the human mind, and to different portions of the world; and yet to all together. One voice was to the age of Abraham and Moses, another to the age of David and Isaiah, another to the age of Paul and Trajan, yet each voice was to all; one voice is to the oriental world, another to the European, yet each to all; and all uttering his name, above every name of whom "Moses in the law, and the prophets did write." In all this there is no incongruity, no discrepancy, but a similarity in the

midst of distinctions ; a reflection of the special *in* the general, and a translucence of the general *through* the special ; a suiting of the sacred volume to the whole world, and a reflection in it of the face, not of one generation or of one people, but of all mankind through all ages. "Its contents present to us the stream of time continuous as life, and a symbol of eternity, inasmuch as the past and future are virtually contained in the present. According, therefore, to our relative position on its banks, the sacred history becomes prophetic, the sacred prophecies historical, while the power and substance of both inhere in its laws, its promises, and its comminations."* Truth in the bible is the voice of God speaking to all time ; it is truth for the human heart, not for one age ; it is the mirror, in which not the much talked of spirit of the age is reflected, but in which *mankind* may see themselves under all circumstances, through all time.

No one of the truths of the bible in reality clashes with another, and it should be read with the remembrance, that if at any time they seem contradictory, the contradiction is probably in the mind of the reader. It should be read with the remembrance, that the sacred writers were not polemics, nor ever feared that by giving strong prominence to one doctrine, they should lead their reader to undervalue or neglect another. They always treated with energy of language and ardor of feeling the subject immediately under consideration, as if the mind were exclusively filled with it ; and they sometimes presented one view of it, sometimes another. Had this always been borne in mind, Paul and James would never have been thought contradictory. We cannot help quoting a passage from Burke, which completely conveys the true principle of interpretation on this subject. It is to be found in his "Appeal from the new to the old whigs."

"As any one of the great members of this constitution happens to be endangered, he that is a friend to all of them, chooses and presses the topics necessary for the support of the part attacked, with all the strength, the earnestness, the vehemence, with all the powers of stating, of argument, of coloring, which he happens to possess, and which the case demands. He is not to embarrass the minds of his hearers, or to incumber or overlay his speech, by bringing into view at once, as if he were reading an academic lecture, all that may and ought, when a just occasion presents itself, to be said in favor of the other members. At that time they are out of the court ; there is no question concerning them. Whilst he opposes his defense on the part where the attack is made, he presumes, that for his regard to the just rights of all the rest, he has credit in every candid mind. He ought not to apprehend that his raising fences about popular privileges this day, will infer that he ought on the next to concur with those who would pull down the throne : because

on the next he defends the throne, it ought not to be supposed that has abandoned the rights of the people."

"A man who, among various objects of his equal regard, is secure of some, and full of anxiety for the fate of others, is apt to go to much greater lengths in his preference of the object of his immediate solicitude, than Mr. Burke has ever done. A man so circumstanced often seems to undervalue, to vilify, almost to reprobate and disown, those that are out of danger. This is the voice of nature and truth, and not of inconsistency and false pretence. The danger of any thing very dear to us, removes for the moment, every other affection from the mind. When Priam had his whole thoughts employed on the body of his Hector, he repels with indignation, and drives from him with a thousand reproaches, his surviving sons, who, with an officious piety crowded about him to offer their assistance. A good critic, (there is no better than Mr. Fox,) would say that this is a master-stroke, and marks a deep understanding of nature in the father of poetry. He would despise a Zoilus, who would conclude from this passage, that Homer meant to represent this man of affliction as hating, or being indifferent or cold in his affections to the poor relics of his house, or that he preferred a dead carcass to his living children."

Another principle of interpretation, drawn from the bible itself, is that *the same credit is due to the words of the apostles as to the words of Christ*. It is no uncommon thing, either in books or conversation, to find the deniers of our Lord's divinity and atonement, expressing great reverence for all that fell from his lips, but evading and denying the authority of what you urge from the inspired apostles. Now this is a manifest inconsistency. In the first place, it is on the authority of the apostles only, that we receive the words of Christ; and in the next place, we must either at once deny the inspiration of the apostles, or else acknowledge that their words are also and equally the words of their Master. Jesus himself said to them, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." "Receive ye the Holy Spirit." "He will guide you into all truth." Well might they say, therefore, "We have the mind of Christ." "The word of God, which ye heard of us, we received not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the word of God." "He, therefore, that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit." "We are of God. He that knoweth God heareth us. He that is not of God heareth us not. **HEREBY KNOW WE THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR.**" We desire nothing more than that our readers should apply this solemn test to Unitarianism, in respect to the discredit its advocates seek to cast upon the sacred writers, especially, the apostles of our Lord and Savior.

Again: *the scriptures ought manifestly to be studied and interpreted, in particular portions, with the remembrance of, and ref-*

erence to, their general harmony. We need to view them, therefore, from a position of sight and feeling very elevated. There is a great and glorious harmony in the bible, which those only can in any measure appreciate, who look upon it with an enlarged and comprehensive view. We may learn much from the analogy of nature. God's plan is perfect in both worlds, natural and moral; but all things were not made for the inspection of one particular mind, or the range of one particular vision: what is beauty to the human vision, would be deformity to the microscopic eye. What we sometimes think defects, we find afterwards, in a more comprehensive view, not only are lost sight of as defects, but add to the symmetry and glory of the scene. When we look at a great painting, if we go nearer than the point of vision, in which the view of each part is sustained by the conception of the whole, the painting will inevitably lose its grandeur, and appear defective, though perhaps perfect in its kind. A fly, sitting on one of the stones in Westminster Abbey, might be soliloquizing on the roughness and deformity of his resting place, while many human beings are admiring the venerable grandeur of the pile.

Let us take an illustration from nature. We have had the happiness, several times, of visiting mount Holyoke in Massachusetts. The scenery of Amherst is very beautiful; even in detail; but examined in detail, there are prospects not peculiarly attractive, and features that appear unsightly to the eye. It would be easy for a caviler, even in regard to the works of nature, to ask of what possible use or beauty is that barren sand bank, or this huge misshapen rock: it would be easy for such a being to ask the like question in regard to minute portions of God's word. But we found, as we traveled up the side of the mountain, that every imperfection, or what we had at first concluded to be such, had gradually disappeared; or was evidently adding, as we advanced, to the increasing glory of the view. Wherever we stopped, and turned to gaze through the forest on the expanding region below, every successive prospect, as we rose higher and higher, exhibited those apparent imperfections changing into beauty; and when at length we found ourselves upon the summit, it was truly a scene of unmingled beauty and grandeur. It was the sublime of loveliness. Towards the South, an almost interminable range of mountain elevations sink behind each other, withdrawing the vision to such a distance, that heaven and earth are at length indistinguishable, and blended together in the atmosphere, and all along beneath them the broad valley of the Connecticut reposes in the light. To the West, what an amphitheater of forests and steepled villages and cultivated farms, rises from the meadows at the foot of the mountain, and recedes, terrace after terrace, to the horizon! Directly beneath us, glides 'at his sweet will,' the pleasant river, a silver thread, it is so far below, through forests of chesnuts, and fields of

broom, and broad meadow lands, dotted with noble elms, looking like gardens in paradise. In the whole scene we scarce know which to admire most, its sublimity or its loveliness.

Now, on the summit of this mountain, (for we have not lost sight of the point to be illustrated,) no one thinks of any unsightly features which he supposed he had met with below; and it would be worth while to travel up the precipice, were it for this only, to find in God's works, what seemed on a near prospect incongruous and out of proportion, composing essential parts of one harmonious whole. It is so with God's word. Incongruities are harmonized, and perplexities lost sight of, in a heart absorbed with a comprehensive view of its glory. What an infidel would term imperfections, contribute to the universal harmony, and are the results of that same freedom and greatness of scale, with which the works of God are all launched into existence; and mysteries and things incomprehensible are like the blending of heaven and earth, in a distance which the eye cannot reach, amidst light that is itself almost a spiritual mystery. Surely it is worth all the self-mortification and prayerful discipline the soul can undergo, to rise to such a glorious conception of God's plan in the moral world, as would be analogous to the view of his physical creation, which one gains from the summit of that beautiful mountain!

There is an external principle of interpretation worth attending to, in the light of which Mr. Norton's speculations about the obsolescence of the doctrine of the trinity are truly ludicrous. For hundreds of years the bible has been in use more or less generally among the body of the people. The common sense of the whole mass of minds has had opportunity for exercise in regard to its interpretation. What now is the system of faith, which the mass of unprejudiced readers have discovered in it, and drawn from it, and in the exhibition of which the bible has proved powerful over the hearts and consciences of men? What is it, that not merely in theory, but in practice, has made the bible the power of God unto salvation? We believe there is no candid man, who knows any thing of the religious history of the world since the days of Christ, any thing of the religious history of England, any thing of the religious history of our own country, who will not acknowledge that it is that system, despised and deemed foolishness by a few, but held, in speculation at least, by the multitude, which comprehends the doctrine of the trinity, but has for its emphatic designation *Jesus Christ and him crucified*; that system which exhibits God's holy law, and its awful penalty, God's infinite holiness and man's depravity, and God's infinite love in a divine Savior provided for the perishing and guilty soul. What other system has ever had the least power over the hearts and consciences of men? Innumerable other systems have been tried: every age has had its own. The spirit of error has risen in ten thousand forms, and in all instances

has pretended to build upon the bible. From Nicolaitans down to Unitarians, multitudes innumerable, all Milton's fallen demons, wandering over the earth in the shape of bible truth,

"Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks

In Vallombrosa——

All these, and more come flocking,"

seeking rest, and finding none. Their errors have risen, and are rising, and will continue to rise and disappear one after the other, accomplishing each in turn, the grand object of the father of lies, to vex the church of God and lure souls to perdition;—rising out of the wickedness and ignorance of the human heart, as fiery exhalations rise from putrid marshes, to dance and burn and go out again in the darkness. But where is there one of them that has proved the power of God unto salvation? Where has the bible been preached in any other way, than as an exhibition of Christ and him crucified, without failing to move the human soul a particle towards its God? It is this system, and no other, that has laid hold with the grasp of omnipotence on the human mind, and no matter how feebly preached, no matter by what contemptible instrument soever, has gone down into the human soul, roused its spiritual energies, broken up the great depths of feeling, unsealed the profoundest fountains of the being, and changed the whole existence from earthly to heavenly, from sin to holiness, from self to God. It has done this in multitudes of instances, when the mightiest exertions of the human intellect would have been lavished in vain. It has done it for the most perfectly abject and degraded of the human race, by whom the exhibitions of the wisdom of this world would have been gazed at with stupid brutality. It is the intellect of God only that can reach, inspire, raise and renew such a being. And the preaching of Jesus Christ and him crucified does it, because it is the intellect of God; and, though denied, and sneered at, and esteemed foolishness by the fearful presumption of some, it is, in reality, the mightiest exhibition of the intellect of the Infinite Jehovah. No wonder it takes hold on the soul; no wonder it can do this, when the art of man is utterly confounded. It is the power of God; it is the arm of his moral omnipotence!

What would a Greenlander or a Hottentot say to the speculations of Priestley or of Dr. Channing? Let us figure to ourselves preachers of this stamp going to exhibit their refinements, their taste, their sentimentality, to a tribe of Esquimaux or a horde of wandering Tartars; going to preach to them about the perfectibility and dignity of human nature, the pure and holy aspirations of the soul, the innocence of unbelief, the mere human character of Jesus Christ, the absurdity of an atonement, the needlessness of a mediator between God and man! Would such a system touch the heart? The thought is a monstrous absurdity. There

is nothing in it that can stir the soul in the least degree, or strike a solitary chord in the recesses of man's spiritual being, or have any other effect whatever than an iceberg, or a continent of icebergs would have upon our whole atmosphere, should it move down from the polar seas, and take up its station along our coast, to remain there moored for centuries! If this freezing, desolate negation of godliness be true christianity, the sovereign, vaunted remedy for infidelity, why do not its adherents try it for the conversion of the world, and prove its truth by its powerful effects? If *this* is the power of God unto salvation, why do they not obey the command of Christ, and go into all the world to preach *this* gospel to every creature? Why leave the evangelization of the world to be effected by the preaching of that very doctrine, and that very system of doctrines, which they cast out as absurd, and even ridiculous,—a libel upon God's character. If they have a better way of exhibiting God's character, a moral talisman of mightier energy than the exhibition of Jesus Christ and him crucified; above all, if they deem the doctrine of atonement, and the truths that shine in its light, a perversion of the bible, and the fictions of gloomy men, bent upon reducing the world to spiritual bondage,—why, in the name of all that concerns man's best interests, do they not send to the perishing, imploring nations, their own LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY, this last, best gift of heaven to man, and let us behold it working its wonders of regenerating mercy on our ruined race? Ah, liberal minded men! your own experience has taught you, that the spirit of a missionary forms no part or principle of your system; nor of any system, that does not bear, written all over it, the loved and adored name of Jesus Christ and him crucified, and that does not breathe throughout, the memory of the Lamb of God, that "taketh away the sin of the world." A missionary's peculiar emphatic designation, his title of honor and love, is and has been all the world over, Missionary of THE CROSS.

This blasphemed system of religious truth—Jesus Christ and him crucified—is the system, in the exhibition of which the bible has exerted its most powerful effect on the intellect as well as the heart of men. In the light of this truth, Professor Norton's assumed intellectual superiority over the doctrine of the trinity, and his grave conclusion that it is expunged from the creed of all who make any pretensions to intelligence, are very amusing. Perhaps he has forgotten the names of Lord Bacon and Henry More; and probably the Halls, the Taylors, the Coleridges, and the Fosters, are in his view men of very weak intellect, by the side of Dr. Channing.

The truth is a great one, and it were well if this age would reflect upon it, that the best period in the literature of Great Britain, the period in which that nation appears, for her intellectual power,

like a giant among the nations, is the one in which her noblest minds were imbued and penetrated with the evangelical system of religious truth, the system that includes the ideas of a holy God, and a holy law, with an adequate sanction; the ideas of a guilty world, an atoning Savior, and a regenerating Spirit; the system that exhibits both the Cross and the Trinity. Then men were abundant, whose learning was not only of a gigantic aspect, but whose love to Christ crucified would have adorned the age of primitive apostolic piety. And when Christ crucified began to be left out of view, and a spiritual death, something like that of Unitarianism, was creeping over the nation, then was it that giants like Howe, Cudworth, and Leighton, began to be succeeded by the Tillotsons, the Seckers, and the Seeds; and together with the departure of the national mind from the spiritual principles that center in the atonement, may be measured the decline of the nation in intellectual energy.

It is nothing but the combined intellectual and moral spirit of the system of the cross, that has produced in the literature of the English tongue, such books as the *Paradise Lost*, Butler's *Analogy*, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, Edwards on the Will, the *Saint's Rest*, the *Blessedness of the Righteous*, Cowper's *Task*, Henry Martyn's *Memoirs*; and such writers of hymns as Watts and Charles Wesley, almost the only individuals who have been eminently successful in this difficult species of composition. Now, think of the system of *liberal christianity* as producing such a work as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*!! The combined energies of all the minds that ever were deluded by that fatal system, would be inadequate to the production of a solitary page.

Again: A great guide to the true interpretation of God's word, is to be found *in the opinion of those, who are known to have communed most closely with God*. They are most likely to discover and know, without mistake, God's precise meaning in the words he uses. This is the dictate of true wisdom, and not of superstition; we act according to it in the things of this world. All men, who have come to such greatness as to be considered authorities among their fellow men, have at one time or another had the meaning of their words, even of their written phrases, disputed. Now, to whom would all most readily repair for a decision of the disputed point? Would it not be to those, if any such could be found, who had been intimately acquainted with the character and habits, both intellectual and moral, of the author in question; who had enjoyed his intimate friendship, and known the workings of his mind, and his opinions on many subjects. To take an individual instance for illustration. James Madison was one amongst the framers of the constitution. He was a friend to Washington, and knew the views and feelings of almost all his fellow laborers.

It is therefore justly and with great wisdom, that we apply to this living oracle, to know what the constitution means, in phrases whose meaning is now made the subject of dispute.

We may learn a lesson from this in regard to God's word. There have been men, especially since the reformation, who have gilded the gloom of the world with the light of a living and radiant piety ; men of great and acknowledged wisdom, who have lived very near to God, who are known and confessed, even by their enemies, to have maintained a close walk with him, and to have arrived at such a degree of holiness, as will render their names illustrious forever. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him ; and such men have participated, as it were, in God's counsels ; have been admitted to the honor of knowing the secrets of his mind ; and are of all others the least likely to be mistaken in their interpretation of God's word. Let us mention a few of their names. Leighton, Usher, Baxter, Hall, Taylor, Howe, the Henrys, Owen, Hale, Sir Robert Boyle, Watts, Doddridge, Newton, Cecil, Bunyan, Henry Martyn, David Brainard, President Edwards, Whitefield, Payson. These are native names ; we have not gone beyond our own language. These and multitudes of others who walked with God through life, trusted in Christ as an Almighty Savior, and loved God's word, because it spake to them of Jesus Christ, and him crucified : it revealed to them, not a catalogue of Unitarian negatives, but the doctrine of the Trinity, and the system of the Cross. " These all died in faith ;" they found in the bible an atoning Savior. We would give more for an opinion on this subject from a man like David Brainard, than for all human arguments else.

We have spoken of the harmony of the bible. One word in regard to its whole spiritual tenor, according to which it should be interpreted in particular passages,—it is manifestly from beginning to end one of *solemn warning*. The beings it addresses are evidently considered by it in peril of their souls forever ; and its whole tenor looks to a day of judgment, and an endless retribution of happiness or misery. The words of particular passages innumerable declare the same thing, with positive and pungent application to every individual conscience. In putting any different construction upon them, we have both to wrest the particular passage from its plain and inevitable signification, and to do equal violence to the argument gathered from the whole tenor of the scriptures. The very object of the bible is to tell men their danger of perdition, and to point out the way whereby they may avoid it. Its professed aim and design, and the whole purpose for which it was sent into the world, is to save men from hell, and to raise them to heaven ; and in view of all this, what shall we call the conduct of those, who, in the very face of all the awful descriptions and warnings of the bible, would gravely persuade us, that there is

no hell! If the bible has not a correspondency in the eternal world to its descriptions and warnings and imagery, if they are descriptions without the correlative realities, of all the books that ever were published, it is the falsest. Such a book would indeed be a marvel and miracle of falsehood; it would require superhuman powers to construct it.

The last principle we shall mention, and one that lies at the foundation of all others is this: *The bible should be interpreted with right feelings of heart*, in the exercise of penitence, humility, faith and love. All the principles we have specified are in subordination to this: a heart friendly to God is the only right interpreter either of his works or word. And this is what our Savior meant when he said, "If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." A sinful heart can have no right views of God, and of course will have defective views of his word. Sin distorts the judgment, and overturns the mind's balance on all moral subjects, far more than even the best of men are aware. There is, there can be, no true reflection of God or his truth from the bosom darkened with guilt, from the heart at enmity against Him. That man will always look at God through the medium of his own selfishness, and at God's word through the coloring of his own wishes, prejudices, and fears. A heart that loves the Savior, and rejoices in God as its sovereign, reflects back in calmness the perfect view of his character, which it finds in his word. Behold, on the borders of a mountain lake, the reflection of the scene above received into the bosom of the lake below. See that crag projecting, the wild flowers that hang out from it, and bend as if to gaze at their own forms in the water beneath. Observe that plat of green grass above, that tree springing from the cleft, and over all the quiet sky, with its sailing clouds, reflected in all its softness and depth from the lake's steady surface. How perfect the reflection! Does it not seem as if there were two heavens? And just as perfect, and clear, and free from confusion and perplexity, is the reflection of God's character and the truths of his word, from the quietness of the heart that loves the Savior, and is seeking God's glory.

Now look again. The wind is on the lake, and drives forward its waters in crested and impetuous waves, angry and turbulent. Where is that sweet image? There is no change above. The sky is clear, the crag projects as boldly, the flowers look just as sweet in their unconscious simplicity; but below, banks, trees and skies, are all mingled in confusion. There is just as much confusion in every unholy mind's idea of God and his blessed word. God and his truth are always clear, always the same; but the passions of men fill their own hearts with obscurity and turbulence; their depravity is in itself obscurity; and through all this perplexity and wilful ignorance, their souls troubled,

like the stormy sea, with restless conflicts of passion, they contend that God is just such a being as they behold him, that their hearts give back the true reflection, and that they themselves are very good beings in his sight. We have heard of a defect in the bodily vision, which represents all objects upside down ; but that man would certainly be called insane, who under the influence of this misfortune, should so blind his understanding, as to believe and assert, that men walk on their heads and that the trees grow downwards. Is it not a much greater insanity for men, who in their hearts do not love God, and in their lives insult and disobey him, to give credit to their own perverted representations of him and his word ? As long as men will continue to look at God's truth through the medium of their own pride and prejudice, so long they will have mistaken views of God and eternity, and are deceiving their own soul into endless ruin.

Of what infinite importance to man's best interests is the right interpretation of God's holy word ! A mistake here is a mistake for eternity. It is so because the bible is so plain a book, that he who runs may read, and if his heart were right with God, could not fail to know precisely what God means. Therefore, whoever takes up with a deceitful interpretation, and suffers himself to be lulled with error, will be found at the great day of judgment to have done it, because he would rather listen to the dictates of his depraved heart, than to the voice of conscience enlightened by God's truth. Followers of Dr. Channing ! beware ! beware ! Unbelief is *not* innocent ; error *is* crime. There would be no error were there no depravity ; it is therefore infinitely dangerous. And remember : You go into eternity, not with Dr. Channing's Discourses, or Professor Norton's Statement of Reasons for not Believing, as your judge ; but, with the bible in your hands, and its declarations of your own character and destiny plain before you. In the light of this book, there are no shadowy and uncertain shapes flitting on the interminable shore of the ocean you are soon to sail ; the scenes that will receive your coming, and surround you forever, are revealed with such fullness of splendor, in characters of such impressive, unalterable, deep-traced truth, that your duty could not be better known, if it were marked by the path of the lightning, on the vaulted sky above you. Oh beware ! If you take not refuge in Christ, you are lost, lost. "*There is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.*"